

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 5307
Dr. Roger R. Seelye

I. Introduction:

Representative Price and esteemed members of the House Education Committee: I am Dr. Roger Seelye, a private practicing optometrist from Owosso, MI and Chair of the Michigan Optometric Association Legislative Committee and I am here to speak in support of HB 5307

II. Statements:

- 1) It is an accepted fact that 80% of all education and learning is through vision and visual input.
- 2) However, as reported by the US Dept. of Health & Human Services, vision disorders are the 4th most common disability in the nation.
- 3) It is also reported by researchers that approximately 60% of students identified as "problem learners" have an undetected vision problem.
- 4) However, 86% of children age 12 and under have never had a comprehensive eye examination.
- 5) Currently, the Michigan Public Health Code requires a "vision screening" prior to entering kindergarten or 1st grade, and subsequent "screenings" in grades 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9.
- 6) The current vision screening program has proven to be useful in detecting some vision problems that can adversely affect learning such as, myopia or nearsightedness, strabismus and amblyopia.
- 7) However, current vision screenings have fallen far short in identifying vision problems that directly affect vision performance at near point ranges where the function of reading takes place; problems such as hyperopia or farsightedness, astigmatism, poor saccadic eye movements, poor convergence ability and other binocular or sensori-motor problems.
- 8) In fact, current screening techniques have only a 29% sensitivity to the vision problems that most affect success or failure in reading development.
- 9) The 2015 failure rate with our current vision screening program is reported to be around 10%, while most available national studies indicate that approximately 32% of all school age children have vision anomalies significant enough to adversely affect reading and learning

performance (based on these figures, it seems as though up to 22% of our students may be slipping through the cracks by having successfully passed the vision screening yet still possessing a disruptive vision problem).

- 10) In a recent study funded by the National Eye Institute, the results of which were published in the January 27th online Journal of Ophthalmology entitled, "Farsightedness Associated With Literacy Problems in Preschoolers", researchers found that farsighted children scored lower than their non-farsighted peers in all three parts of the testing, which measured preschool children's knowledge of print, vocabulary and phonological awareness, all essential skills in normal reading development.
- 11) Michigan is presently tied for 40th nationally in 3rd grade reading performance while other states with greater percentages of "at risk" children and students living in poverty scored significantly higher in like testing.
- 12) Early diagnosis of eye and vision problems can prevent life-long problems of failure, aberrant behavior and low self-esteem.
- 13) Comprehensive eye exams for children, who have already proven to be under-performing, are critical for the early intervention needed to detect and treat conditions of uncompensated refractive error, anisometropia, amblyopia, strabismus, binocular vision and sensorimotor problems adversely affecting reading development and academic performance, as well as, detecting life-threatening conditions such as retinoblastoma.
- 14) Amblyopia is the leading cause of vision loss in Americans under age 4 and is preventable and treatable when diagnosed early.
- 15) Studies have found links between juvenile delinquency and undiagnosed vision problems. One study found that 70% of juvenile offenders had an undiagnosed vision problem
- 16) Studies have also proven that persons with undetected and untreated vision problems have overall been: a) less productive over their life-time and; b) have had a greater negative impact on society in costs such as increased IEP's, special education services, and increased costs of crime and incarceration.
- 17) The US Department of Health and Human Services estimates that the financial impact of undetected and untreated visual disorders and disabilities cost the economy more than 38.4 billion dollars annually.

- 18) HB 5307 will ensure that students with a vision or reading deficiency will receive a comprehensive eye examination. If a pupil has a vision deficiency as demonstrated by a routine "vision screening"; has been identified as being a "struggling" or "under-performing" reader by his or her teacher; has been placed on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP); or, has failed to achieve a score of at least proficient on the applicable grade level assessment, it will set in motion a sequence of events whereby the student's parent(s) will be notified of the need of an eye examination by a licensed Doctor of Optometry or a medical or osteopathic physician specializing in ophthalmology, with the results of that evaluation and any form of treatment or recommended intervention being communicated by the eye care provider back to the referring educational facility, completing the process all within less than 90 days.
- 19) The question of cost of mandated eye examinations always is and should be a concern...
- 20) However, the American Optometric Association conducted a study that found that, presently, approximately 70% of all school-aged children have eye and vision examination coverage through private insurance, Medicaid, S-CHIP, or other state or federal funded programs.
- 21) Additionally, since the advent of the Affordable Care Act, where "Children's Eye Exams" are listed as an Essential Benefit in all ACA health plans, access to routine eye and vision care has increased.
- 22) Experience in other states has also proven to be positive in regard to cost; Kentucky, which has had a mandatory eye exam law for all children in place for approximately 15 years, spends less than \$5,000 per year on children that do not have any other coverage.
- 23) I wholeheartedly ask for your support of HB 5307, which will benefit many at risk children in Michigan who have been needlessly falling through the cracks and dealing with failure rather than success. Any small investment in the children at this time will certainly pay dividends in savings in costs throughout their entire lives.
- 24) I sincerely thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.
- 25) I now would like to introduce my colleague, Dr. David Damari, Dean of the Michigan College of Optometry at Ferris State University for further comment.